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Essential Work?

Prole Wave

March 28, 2020

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Splitting proles into the categories of ‘essential workers’ and ‘non-essential workers’ (if they’re employed at all!) is a reflection of capitalist ideology. ALL wage labor is an imposition whether caring for the infirm or filing papers in some business firm. What is today highlighting the role of so-called ‘essential workers’ is the overwhelming risk that they are compelled to enter, via the wage and/or vocational notions, to keep the capitalist world humming along. But it is this non-communal, piecemeal and capitalist approach to confronting the pandemic which ends up over-burdening these ‘essential workers’ with the responsibility for resolving or providing logistical support for a crisis not of their making and of which they have very little say. As it stands, a largely wildcat strike wave is upon us (e.g. Instacart, Amazon, Whole Foods, sanitation workers, bus drivers, etc.). These workers are striking in rejection of their being sacrificed during these times of pandemic. They become another resource, another number deployed by bosses and the State and not a part of a communal social fabric combating something which can effect us all. Capitalist media abounds with stories of the hero-making myth of many workers, but as we see more and more even these workers know when they’re

being swindled into believing their occupation is a lofty vocation that somehow exists *above* capitalist social relations.

Specifically waged labor now dubbed as essential is often deeply racialized & gendered under capitalism; its perpetuation would only further the naturalization of sexist & racist notions of who is *naturally* pre-disposed for which kind of labor. Some may feel smugly superior to their boss knowing that their labor is more ‘essential’ than that of others, but the fact of the matter is that ALL wage labor creates a social situation which only benefits those who profit. What people are rightly noticing is that certain kinds of labor are indeed superfluous to human existence, something which communists & anarchists have never denied, but to simplistically champion the labor necessary for human existence ***under capitalism*** would merely reinforce the racialized & gendered division of labor, whether waged or unwaged. Suffice to say it also naturalizes the capitalist category of *labor* (where proles are reduced to their labor power). We are more than workers.

To re-imagine how we can communally care for each other is something that we must bear in mind and action, as communists & anarchists, if we care about overcoming what a racist & sexist capitalist system offers us. Those dubbed as ‘essential workers’ cannot pay rent with our well-wishing, cannot be protected from infection with thank-yous or attend to their families while being forced to work interminable hours. The beginning of truly communal care is beyond the realm of capitalist work. Otherwise care and health work will be relegated to the same over-burdened workers. It is *essential* that we support employed proles on strike, as well as those who may not have the capacity to go on strike, by not crossing the picket-line and not buying into capitalist ideology that says their labor *must not stop*. It is clear the State and capitalists have no real plan to get out of this manifold crisis that does not include primarily saving their capitalist economy. The transformation of this *social crisis* into a crisis for the capital-

ists, through communist measures, is what will help us truly care for each other and abolish capitalist social relations once and for all.